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ABSTRACT

The problem of teaching standard English reading and language skills to children who speak nonstandard dialects can be facilitated through a language program that distinguishes between "everyday talk" and "school talk," while recognizing the position of both types of speech. The instructional materials must be meaningful with respect to the experiential background of the learner. At no time during the learning situation should the child be given the impression that his basic, established speech patterns are inferior speech. In this particular language program, verb usage constitutes the area of distinction between the two types of language, and the instructional procedures and practices described here emphasizes those differences. Research indicates that if the children's established speech forms are accepted as legitimate forms of communication while those speech forms used in school by the teacher and observed in the books are systematically introduced, the children readily accept and enjoy learning the speech forms traditionally fostered by the school. For related document, see FL 002 947. (Author/VM)

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Should Non-Standard Speech Patterns be Used in the Urban Language Arts Curriculum?*

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There is vigorous disagreement among and between educators, psychologists, and linguists concerning the acceptability of non-standard speech patterns as legitimate forms of communication. The "standard English advocates" reject non-standard patterns on the basis that they interfere with effective thinking. The "non-standard advocates" maintain that non-standard speech patterns permit the user to engage in just as high level abstract reasoning and overall problem solving as does the standardized dialect.

Bernstein's research(1964) has possibly exerted the strongest influence in support of the first position. He concluded from his research comparing the speech patterns of lower class children with children from communities of middle-class economic and social status that the lower class children fail to learn a linguistic code that enables them to deal with the complex and abstract situations they will encounter in formal education. The "restricted" code (as Bernstein has labelled it) tends to fixate the child to a limited conceptual level. On the other hand, Bernstein contends that the "elaborated" code learned by the middle-class child prepares him to function at the abstract conceptual level required for effective problem solving in our complex society.

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Many educators, psychologists, and linguists have accepted Bernstein's interpretation of his data and his overall conclusions. Perhaps the most adamant and vocal of those on the current scene who accept this position are Bereiter and Engelmann.(1966) They have taken the position that for children coming from communities where non-standard speech patterns are used, the teacher should "start from zero" and proceed on the assumption that the children have no prior knowledge of English.

A beautiful example refuting the above point of view was recently related to me by Mrs. Olga Davis, a member of our research staff. A practice teacher under her supervision was teaching her first grade class the concepts of death and extinct. When the faculty member from the university came to observe the practice teacher she was appalled to find they were expecting disadvantaged first grade children to distinguish between such abstract terms as "death" and "extinct." Mrs. Davis had not observed any special difficulties the children were having with the concepts but decided she would again question the children concerning their recall of the concepts. She approached the class and asked, "Children, you rember we discussed "death" and "extinct" last week? Can you tell me about our discussion? John raised his hand and said, "Martin Luther King, he extinct." Floyd immediately exclaimed, "That's not right. He just one man. There whole lot of other people still running around. Extinct mean whole lot of things used to be alive and walking around and you don't see them no more - like them dinasars, they extinct."

Fasold(1970) also gives a good illustration of this position by pointing out that one cannot claim there is something inherently illogical about sentences with double negatives unless we are prepared to claim that all French speakers think illogically.

Comprehensive discussions of the legitimacy of black non-standard English are found in the writings of Shuy,(1966,69) Stewart(1970), and Carrol(1971).

Sledd(1969), an eminent linguistic scholar, has arrived at a point in his thinking where he questions the wisdom of imposing the standard dialect on children at all. He suggests the possibility that the rejection of "Black English" is a form of displaced racial prejudice. In this respect he states: "The fact is, of course, that northern employers and labor leaders dislike black faces but use black Englisn as an excuse." (P. 131)

He strongly feels that forcing a child to learn standard English using repetitive drill derived by analogy from structuralist methods of teaching foreign languages can be especially harmful to the child's self-concept. In referring to a research report describing the success of this approach, he states:

> "Professor Troike can argue the success of his methods by showing that after six months of drills a little black girl could repeat 'his hat' after her teacher, instead of translating automatically to 'he hat'. Unfortunately, taped do not record psychological damage, or compare the effectiveness of other ways of teaching, or show what might better have been learned in the same time instead of learning to repeat 'his hat'." (P. 1312)

Instead, Sledd(1969) offers the following recommendations:

> "Bidalectalism would never have been invented if our society were not divided into the dominant white majority and the exploited minorities. Children should be taught that. They should be taught the relations between group differences and speech differences, and the good and bad uses of speech differences by groups and by individuals. The teaching would require a more serious study of grammar, lexicography, dialectology, and linguistic history than our educational system now provides - require it at least of prospective English teachers." (P. 1315)

Kochmann(1969) has also strongly urged that we should not force standard English speech patterns on black, urban children - especially the adolescent living in the black ghetto. Instead we should focus on intensive language instruction within the framework of the nonstandard forms with which the child can identify.

The author and his colleagues on the Psycholinguistic Experimental Project have been engaged during the past seven years in testing an approach in Language Arts instruction that differs in some basic aspects from both the positions just discussed.(1965, 1967, 1969, 1971)

The ultimate acceptance of Bernstein's position would force one to conclude that the "elab orated" code used by the columnist William Buckley results in more effective thinking than the "restricted" code frequently used by Samuel Clements or Will Rogers. I cannot accept this conclusion. On the other hand, the position taken by those who feel it is undesirable or unnecessary to have children learn the standardized dialect is also unrealistic. Sledd, I feel, is correct in his concern for the psychological damage that can be done by belittling the established speech patterns of the child's home and community. He is wrong, in my opinion, in concluding that standardEnglish cannot be taught in a way that respects the established speech patterns of the child when he enters school. Children, especially primary grade children, usually want to please their teacher. If standard English is introduced as another way of saying something already familiar to them, the negative results described by Sledd need not occur. In fact, our research has shown that if the children's established speech forms are accepted as legitimate forms of communication while those speech forms used in the school by the teacher and observed in the books are systemmatically introduced, the children readily accept and enjoy learning the speech forms traditionally fostered by the school.

Our research was initiated to test a model of Language Arts instruction based on the following conjectures and assumptions.

The first conjecture is based on substantial research findings concluding that the material to which the learner is introduced should be meaningful with respect to the experiencial background of the learner. To apply this concept in the area of Language Arts instruction requires the acceptance and utilization of the child's established speech patterns. This is especially important when working with children whose speech patterns are different in some basic respects from standard English.

Secondly, at no time during the learning situation should the child be

given the impression that his basic established speech patterns are inferior speech. The child is, however, expected to learn to distinguish between his familiar speech patterns and the standard ones which may be unfamiliar to him. To facilitate this distinction, we introduce in our research model the concept of EVERYDAY TALK and SCHOOL TALK. EVERYDAY TALK refers to the non-standard pattern with respect to verb usage. SCHOOL TALK refers to the statement or story in which the verb form corrrsponds to the standardized dialect. Since the child feels most comfortable in using the EVERYDAY TALK patterns that are familiar to him, the initial emphasis in the approach we are testing - in beginning reading and the oral language activities - is placed on having the child make the transition from the familiar EVERYDAY TALK form to the unfamiliar SCHOOL TALK form. However, once the child has mastered the SCHOOL TALK form, the teacher may ask a child or the class if a particular statement is EVERYDAY TALK or SCHOOL TALK. If it is SCHOOL TALK, the child may be asked to change the statement to EVERYDAY TALK or vice versa.

In considering programs for children whose speech patterns differ from standard English, the problem arises as to what aspect of standard English should be emphasized in the program. Differences occur in grammatical form, pronunciation and vocabulary. In considering these differences, the question arises as to which pronunciation system can be identified as corresponding to the standard dialect. Also, even if a standard pronunciation system can be identified and justified, will it be educationally feasible with primary children to focus on this aspect of the standard dialect. Even if it were possible and feasible to identify and teach a standard pronunciation system to primary grade children, there is far more tolerance in our society toward regional variations in pronunciation and vocabulary than toward differences in verb usage. In considering these questions, it was concluded that in our research we would focus only on the difference between the standard and non-standard dialects that existed

in the area of verb usage. Pronunciation would be considered only if it determined the form of the verb, i.e., work, works.

The decision to focus on verbs only as the distinguishing variable between the non-standard and the standard was also influenced by the fact that in many cases the transistion from the non-standard to the standard pattern can be made by adding to the non-standard pattern. For example, the statement, "My daddy strong" can be changed to the standard dialect by adding "is." Similarly, "My daddy work." can be changed to the standard pattern by adding "s". This aspect of the model is consistent with research studies in learning that show learning is enhanced if it starts at a point meaningful to the learner and avoids the necessity to unlearn previously learned material. Therefore, in developing our research materials, we tried to focus primarily on the speech patterns of the children that could be changed into standard forms by adding to the non-standard form.

Each program developed as part of our research will now be briefly described as it relates to the model just described.

The reading series consists of eight units(1969). The focus of each unit is on a particular verb form that frequently appears in the non-standard form in the child's informal conversation. The content of the stories focus on the child, his community, and his ethnic group.

The EVERYDAY TALK story is introduce first, followed by the same story in which the verb form has been changed to correspond to the SCHOOL TALK form. The verb forms appear in the experimental reading materials as follows:

		EVERYDAY TALK	SCHOOL TALK
Unit 1	All About Me	Employs the verb got	Introduces the verb have
Unit 2	All About Me and My Family	Absence of is and are	Introduces is and are

Unit 3	In My House and In My School	Absence of third person singular	Introduces the verb ending -s
Unit 4	Yesterday	Absence of ed ending	Introduces the ed ending
Unit 5	Working and Playing	Employs use of do	Introduces does
Unit 6	At School	Employs use of "be" in place in place of am, is, and are	Introduces am, is, and are in place of be
Unit 7	I Be (Am) Scared When...	Employs he be, we be and they be	Introduces standard forms he is, we are, and they are in place of he be, we be, and they be
Unit 8	Afro-Americans	Serves as a review for the verb patterns introduced in the preceding books. This book has only one set of stories in which the verb slot is left blank and the child is to fill in the blank with the SCHOOL TALK form.	

Each unit is printed as a separate paperback book. By this arrangement, as soon as a child has completed a book, it becomes his property to take home and hopefully to share with his younger brothers and sisters. Space is provided in several of the books for the children to write their own stories. If the child's story uses the non-standard verb form under consideration, he is asked to change it into the standard form. If the child's story uses "SCHOOL TALK" verb forms, he may be asked to change it to "EVERYDAY TALK" verb forms.

In the Oral Language Program, developed as a companion program to the reading series, emphasis is placed on the same verb forms used in the reading materials(1968).

Each unit introduces a new verb form. The verb forms are introduced so as to prevent errors of distributiin. For example, the verb form "are" is introduced immediately following the completion of the lessons dealing with

the verb "is" to avoid overcorrections such as "they is". In accordance with the first condition of the model, the instructional sequence begins by the teacher asking a question or having the children comment on a story designed to elicit a response with respect to the particular verb under consideration in the unit. Each statement made by the children is identified by the teacher as either EVERYDAY TALK or SCHOOL TALK. Value words such as right/wrong, correct/incorrect are not used in this model. The teacher explains to the children that EVERYDAY TALK and SCHOOL TALK are simply different ways of expressing the same thought. It is, however, explained to the children that SCHOOL TALK may be more appropriate to use in one situation and EVERYDAY TALK in another.

Following the activities emphasizing the relatively unstructured statements made by the children, prewritten sentences and stories in EVERYDAY TALK are introduced in each unit for practice in changing from EVERYDAY TALK to SCHOOL TALK. These activities are followed by dialogues and pattern practice drills that serve as a review for the standard English patterns introduced in the present and previous units. Finally, at the close of each unit, each dhild is asked to give an informal oral presentation using SCHOOL TALK in a relatively unstructured and informal situation. It should be noted that at no time during the SCHOOL TALK - EVERYDAY TALK lessons is the teacher required to interrupt the child to correct his speech. If a non-standard form occurs in the child's statement that has been introduced in previous lessons, the teacher will ask the child or the class if the statement was EVERYDAY TALK or SCHOOL TALK. If, however, the verb form is one that has not been introduced in the oral language activities, the teacher will not call attention to the non-standard form.

Test data was obtained on the reading program at the completion of the first year and again when they were finishing third grade. The data obtaine at the completion of the first year is reported in detail in another paper written by the present author (1971).

The major findings briefly summarized are as follows:

(1) The data obtained at the close of the first year showed that the group that received both the EVERYDAY TALK version and the SCHOOL TALK version of the reading materials made fewer errors than the control group in 19 of the 20 variables investigated. The control group were children who were instructed by the same teacher but who were only given the SCHOOL TALK version of the materials.

(2) On the Metropolitan Reading Test administered on a city-wide basis to all third grade children in the Chicago Public Schools, the reading scores of the children who had learned to read using the experimental reading materials surpassed those of the other third grade children in the school, especially on the extreme areas of the distrubution. Table 1 gives the results of these findings.

Table 1

Comparison of Scores of the Experimental Class With the Other Third Grade Children in the School on the Four Reading Sub-tests of the Metropolitan Elementary Test

	Above 1.5	Above 2.0	Above 2.5	Above 3.0	Above 3.5
Reading					
Experimental	100%	100%	58%	36%	18%
Control	97%	89%	50%	19%	04%
Word Knowledge					
Experimental	100%	71%	47%	29%	17%
Control	87%	75%	48%	20%	07%
Word Discrimination					
Experimental	100%	82%	47%	35%	29%
Control	88%	93%	53%	24%	17%
Language					
Experimental	100%	94%	64%	52%	17%
Control	88%	80%	64%	34%	13%

N for Experimental Group = 17
N for Control Group = 76

It will be noted that in all subtests shown in Table 1 the low children in the experimental group were higher than the low children in the other third grade classes in the school.

There are at this time several studies in progress using the Psycholinguistic Reading materials to replicate and/or investigate in further detail the findings with respect to the experimental materials described in this paper.

Possibly the most significant value of the model just described lies in the influence it has on the attitude and behavior of the teacher toward the childrens' oral speech. The traditional approaches to reading and oral language programs frequently have not taken into account the effect of the non-standard dialect on the interaction between teacher and child and possibly to a large extent has contributed to the difficulty many of the children have had in learning to read and achieve ultimate success in the school situation.

In using the model, the teacher is at no time required to criticize the oral speech of the children while they are beginning to read or during the oral language arts activities.

In closing, a few comments should be added concerning the implications the model presented in this paper has for future research. The model places emphasis on the phrase as the intitial unit given to the child in the beginning reading situation as contrasted to the isolated word emphasized in the "look-see" approach or the individual sounds contained in the word as emphasized in the phonic approach. In using the phrase as the primary unit in the beginning reading situation, the variables of pitch and stress are introduced as possible aids to comprehension. There is essential agreement among scholars of language concerning the fact that in early speech development pitch and stress take precedent over vocabulary as indicators of meaning. Parents, for example, have little difficulty in determining from the early babblings of

their child not only what mood the child is communicating but also whether the utterance is a question or command.

In view of the importance of pitch and stress in early speech development, investigations should be made as to the possible effect the utilization of the phrase as the initial emphasis in beginning reading instruction might have, not only with children whose speech patterns differ from standard English, but also with the large group of children who speak standard English.

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